

## NOTES

### An Iberian Storage Jar from Cople

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In the period between 1600 and 1900 there was a considerable and flourishing trade between England and Holland on the one hand and the Iberian Peninsula on the other. This trade is not lacking in documentation and would be worthy of much greater study that currently seems to be available.<sup>1</sup> In particular its artifactual evidence would repay greater comment.

Amongst the artifacts of Iberian origin which have survived in northern Europe are several different types of ceramic, one of which is briefly considered in this note. Another, differently shaped vessel is also known<sup>2</sup> and an example from Lakenheath, Suffolk, has recently been published.<sup>3</sup> These olive jars are contemporary imports from Iberia to a vessel which has long been in Bedford Museum. This storage jar was found a number of years ago at Cople and since its acquisition by Bedford Museum has been in the entrance lobby. The large vessel (fig 1) is of unknown history, though it has all the hallmarks of a genuine import rather than a later copy. It is in an unglazed, pink earthenware fired to a white and pink variegated surface on the outside and a deeper colour inside. It has a wide, open mouth, internally seated for a lid, the diameter at the inside being 19cm, with a maximum rim diameter of 32cm, round the thickened and out-turned rim. The large body has curving but flattened shoulders and below the greatest girth virtually straight sides going down to a flat base. The lower part is a perfect truncated cone. The flat base is 31cm externally; and internally the base has been measured at 24cm. The vessel is 31cm at its greatest girth and 81cm high. On the shoulder and extending to just below the greatest girth are two vestigial handles. Each is above an extremely worn plaque. On these, little of the press mark can be made out. There is certainly a bar with a central hump at the top and remnants of letters below. It would seem that these can be best interpreted as a reversed 'B' on the right, though this could be an 'F' as the lower part is indistinct. It has been drawn as a 'B' but as the figure shows no trace of the vertical remains. The left-hand side of the plaque is totally indistinct except for a small curle in the upper

part towards the outside. It would be unwise to suggest a more exact description of these letters, though 'CB' with each of the letters reversed is possible.

Plaques are a feature of jars of the eighteenth and earlier centuries.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of the use of the Florentine lily on jars from Hoorn, West Friesland, and Wapping, London, and the use of the arms of the Grand Duke of Tuscany by London oilmen who used these jars as their shop signs, it has been suggested by J.H. Ashdown that some jars are Tuscan in origin.<sup>5</sup> It is not improbable that Italian finds may bring to light other examples of the type. Other groups have been found in Portugal, and Spain is an equally probable source, especially for early ones.

These vessels, like the Cople example, feature in an important marine painting, the *Old Custom House Quay*, painted by Samuel Scott (1710-1772) and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Painted in 1757, which is known also by another version in the Fishmongers Hall, City of London, by the title, the *East India Company Quay*.<sup>6</sup> The genre, whether English, French or Dutch, does not though seem again to have included these jars among the incidental objects.

It has been observed that these vessels were copied in England by vessels without a plaque beneath the handles and often with a cross scratched on the base. Often made as copies for garden ornaments, a distinguishing feature is a high, rounded rim and sometimes a tall neck. An example with the latter features is in the south porch of Eaton Bray church, now painted red on the upper part and used as an umbrella stand.

As has been said, the early history of the Cople jar is unknown. It may have been a garden jar as with those at Colchester Museum and the Yorkshire Museum, York, but when first shipped to England, it would have been more practical in its contents. Wine, most probably, rather than oil would have been its contents: oil requires glaze to prevent seepage.<sup>7</sup> Lids are known and particularly when also tied inside a sacking cover, the pot would have been quite stable in the hold of a vessel from Porto or Aviero, Malaga or Sevilla.

That they have been transported accounts for

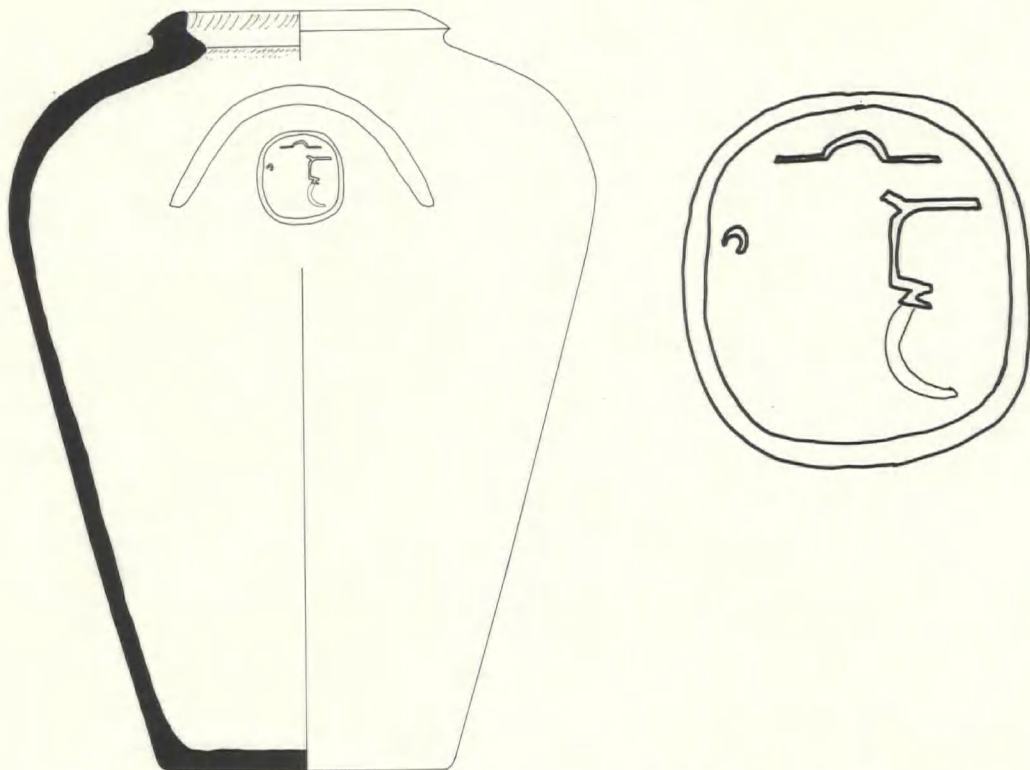


Fig 1 Iberian Storage Jar found at Cople, with details of plaque. (Scales: pot at  $\frac{1}{8}$ ; plaque at  $\frac{1}{2}$ ).

fragments found in wrecks like that from Mewstone Ledge, near Plymouth, and on shorelines as at Wapping and Brentford.

Both England and the Netherlands have extensive finds:<sup>8</sup> that from Hoorn has been mentioned and others are known in museums at Arnhem, Leeuwarden and Amsterdam. Those in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, include one with vestigial handles over a plaque with a 'CB with an olive tree between' and another with two broad bands set on the body, dividing it into three unequal parts.<sup>9</sup>

The latter is obviously a variant of this type of jar of Mediterranean, and specifically Italian and Iberian origins, of which that from Cople is the more customary form.<sup>10</sup>

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1 The principal works in English are J. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace with Old Spain, 1667-1750*, 1940; H.E.S. Fisher, *The Portugal Trade*, 1971; and more generally the essays in W.E. Minchinton (ed), *The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, 1969; archival evidence unused so far by scholars includes the papers of Thomas Robinson, second

Baron Grantham, when Ambassador to Spain, 1770-1779, now in Bedfordshire County Record Office, documents L25 and L30/14.

2 J.M. Coggin, 'The Spanish Olive Jar', *Yale Univ. Pub. Anthropol.* 62, 1960; also examples from Bristol, *Med. Arch.* 8, 1964, 211 and fig 72, 95; and Tresco, Isles of Scilly, *Post Med. Arch.* 4, 1970, 23 no 29; for a study of those in collections in Cambridge (England) and Amsterdam see D.H. Kennett, 'Jarros importado desde peninsular Iberica em norte Europas', *Conimbriga* forthcoming.

3 D.H. Kennett, 'A Portuguese Jar from Lakenheath', *Proc. Suffolk Inst. Arch.* 33, 1974, 90-93.

4 For a general consideration of this type of jar see J.H. Ashdown, 'Mewstone Ledge site: Oil Jars', *Int. J. Naut. Arch.* 1, 1972, 147-153.

5 Ashdown, 1972, 151.

6 Ashdown, 1972, 149-150 with fig 8 for detail of the cited painting.

7 I owe this point to Miss M.D. Craster.

8 Further details can be found in Ashdown, 1972.

9 I wish to thank Miss Heukensfeldt Jansen for assistance at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. The second of my cited examples is on public exhibition in the gallery devoted to Dutch History.

10 Paper completed May 1973. I am grateful to Mr F.W. Kuhlicke, the then Director, for facilities to study this vessel in Bedford Museum, and for permission to publish it.